

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7436

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

CINCPAC

SECDEF

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 9540

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO; CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, RP

SUBJ: MARCOS CREATES NEW PROVINCES IN MUSLIM AREAS; REHABILI-
TATION COUNCIL AND NEW MILITARY COMMAND

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT MARCOS HAS DIVIDED COTABATO AND SULU PROVINCES INTO THREE AND TWO NEW PROVINCES, RESPECTIVELY; FORMED COUNCIL HEADED BY MRS. MARCOS TO COORDINATE PROGRAMS TO REHABILITATE VICTIMS OF FIGHTING IN SOUTH, AND CREATES NEW MILITARY COMMAND FOR SULU ARCHIPELAGO. DIVISION OF COTABATO INTO CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM AREAS COULD HELP DEFUSE CONTINUING INSURGENCY IN THIS PART OF MINDANAO. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS HAS ANNOUNCED THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS SIGNED PRESIDENTIAL DECREE ON AUGUST 18 DIVIDING COTABATO (NORTH) INTO THREE PROVINCES AND SULU INTO TWO. AT THE SAME TIME HE CREATED AN ORGANIZATION CALLED THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE REHABILITATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS IN MINDANAO AND SULU, WITH AN INITIAL BUDGET OF TEN MILLION
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PESOS AND CHAIRED BY HIS WIFE, MRS. MARCOS, TO COORDINATE EFFORTS

BY THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE GROUPS TO ASSIST PERSONS AFFECTED BY THE CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.

2. COTABATO, THE SIXTH MOST POPULOUS PROVINCE IN THE COUNTRY WITH 1.1 MILLION PEOPLE, HAS BEEN DIVIDED INTO THE NEW PROVINCES OF MAGUINDANAO, SULTAN KUDARAT AND COTABATO. PRESIDENT MARCOS DESIGNATED PRESENT COTABATO GOVERNOR CARLOS CAJELO AS ACTING GOVERNOR OF MAGUINDANAO, AND FORMER COTABATO GOVERNOR SIMEON DATU-MANONG AS ACTING GOVERNOR OF SULTAN KUDARAT. THE ACTING GOVERNOR OF COTABATO HAS NOT BEEN NAMED.

3. SULU PROVINCE, POPULATION OF 426,000 HAS BEEN SPLIT INTO SULU AND TAWI-TAWI PROVINCES, CENTERED AROUND THE TWO LARGEST ISLANDS OF THE SULU ARCHIPELAGO. GOVERNOR MURPHY SANGKULA WILL REMAIN AS THE GOVERNOR OF SULU. PHIL NAVY COMMODORE ROMULO ESPALDON, PRESENTLY DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF OF ARMED FORCES OF PHILS AND A CHRISTIAN NATIVE OF SULU, HAS BEEN NAMED ACTING GOVERNOR OF THE NEW PROVINCE OF TAWI-TAWI. ESPALDON WILL CONCURRENTLY HEAD THE NEWLY-ORGANIZED SULU SEA FRONTIER COMMAND AND WILL SUPERVISE MILITARY AFFAIRS IN THE TWO PROVINCES; HE WAS INSTRUCTED BY PRESIDENT MARCOS TO EXHAUST ALL OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING ABOUT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT IN THIS AREA.

4. PUBLIC INFO SEC TATAD WAS QUOTED IN PRESS AS SAYING RESIDENTS OF COTABATO AND SULU HAD ASKED CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATION IN PAST YEARS TO DIVIDE BOTH PROVINCES AND HAD EXPRESSED SAME DESIRE IN JULY 27 REFERENDUM REMARK SHEETS. PRESIDENT MARCOS ALSO REPORTEDLY TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION VIEWS OF VISITING ISLAMIC FOREIGN MINISTERS IN CREATING NEW PROVINCES.

5. COMMENT: COTABATO AND SULU ARE THE TWO PRINCIPAL CENTERS OF THE NINE-MONTH OLD MUSLIM INSURGENCY. DIVISION OF COTABATO HAS BEEN SUGGESTED FOR SOME TIME AND, WHILE DETAILS OF THE DECREE ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ONE OF NEW PROVINCES WILL BE PREDOMINATELY MUSLIM, ONE PREDOMINATELY CHRISTIAN AND ONE MIXED. ONE OF THE MAJOR DEMANDS OF COTABATO REBELS HAS BEEN THE REMOVAL OF COTABATO GOVERNOR CAJELO, A CHRISTIAN WITH AN ANTI-MUSLIM REPUTATION. WHILE CAJELO APPARENTLY HAS SURVIVED THE NEW CHANGES, THE APPOINTMENT OF A MUSLIM AS GOVERNOR IN ONE OR POSSIBLY TWO OF THE NEW PROVINCES, WHERE THE COTABATO INSURGENTS ARE STRONGEST, CONFIDENTIAL

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MAY HELP EASE A MAJOR MUSLIM GRIEVANCE CREATED BY THE DISPLACEMENT OF MUSLIM POLITICIANS BY CHRISTIANS IN THE 1969 AND 1971 ELECTIONS IN COTABATO. DATU-MANONG, HOWEVER, WHO REPRESENTS THE OLDER DISCREDITED MUSLIM LEADERSHIP IN COTABATO REPORTEDLY HAS LITTLE INFLUENCE WITH THE NEW ELEMENTS WHO HAVE LED THE INSURGENCY.

6. REASONS FOR DIVIDING PREDOMINATELY MUSLIM SULU ARE UNCLEAR. ESPALDON, A HIGHLY COMPETENT AND RESPECTED OFFICER, IS THE FIRST

MILITARY GOVERNOR APPOINTED UNDER MARTIAL LAW, AND CREATION OF NEW MILITARY COMMAND FOR SULU ARCHIPELAGO HEADED BY ESPALDON SEEMS DESIGNED TO REMOVE THIS SENSITIVE AREA FROM RESPONSIBILITY OF SOUTH-WEST COMMAND HEAD COMMODORE GIL FERNANDEZ, WHO HAS COME UNDER INCREASING CRITICISM IN RECENT MONTHS. FERNANDEZ PRESUMABLY RETAINS MILITARY COMMAND OVER TWO ZAMBOANGA PROVINCES, WHERE AT LEAST TWO MORE ARMY BATTALIONS ARE SCHEDULED TO REINFORCE THREE ARMY AND MARINE BATTALIONS ON BASILAN ISLAND ON AUGUST 22 FOR MAJOR OFFENSIVE TO RESTORE GOVT. CONTROL. (AIRGRAM WILL FOLLOW.) SULLIVAN

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